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Upgrades Made to IST Technology Labs

1/30/2004

Implementation of the first phase of the School of Information Studies ambitious computer lab upgrade project has been successfully completed—a result of the school's ongoing commitment to meet the experiential learning needs of its students. The second phase is to be concluded by the end of spring semester 2004.

The Instructional Lab (iLab) upgrade replaces the former computers with 28 Dell Optiplex 3 GHz Pentium IV systems with 1 Gigabyte of RAM and gigabit Ethernet networking capabilities and includes the installation of state-of-the-art dual-monitor systems from DoubleSight Displays. The dual monitors provide students with more desktop space for work on traditional applications and make possible the display of multiple virtual operating systems, which is a capability important to our networking, system administration, database, and web development courses.

The Information Technology Experiential Learning Lab (ITELL) upgrade expands its seating capacity to 24 seats, from its previous 16 seats, making the lab suitable for use by technology classes with larger enrollments. ITELL is equipped with a range of computer and network hardware, including switches, routers, and wireless access points, which allows faculty to teach network-oriented courses more effectively. A full-structured wiring system has been installed that allows students to implement and test advanced networking capabilities when used with the switches and routers. The school has also secured lab licenses for the latest network analysis software from Wild Packets and AirMagnet.

Phase 2 of the upgrade project will involve installation of VMware software, a network-attached storage system (NAS) with a capacity of over one terabyte, and a gigabit Ethernet lab network that will link the iLab and ITELL to back-end servers. Central to this upgrade is the VMware software environment that will allow students to install, configure, and operate multiple operating systems on a single machine. For instance, a student could configure a Windows XP client running a web database query tool in one window communicating with a web application server running under a Windows 2000 server in a second window talking to a SQL database server running under Linux in a third window with a virtual network environment interconnecting the three systems. Furthermore, students who are working on projects that span several weeks, or the entire semester, will be able to save their operating system and application environments to the NAS system and retrieve those "images" the next time they are working in the lab. These capabilities will allow numerous students to work concurrently on the development of complex computing environments, enabling them to acquire practical technology skills that will make them more competitive in today's job market.

Staffing of the labs has increased to support the new infrastructure and increasing

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utilization of the facilities. This support will be delivered by highly qualified students enrolled in our Master of Science programs in information management and in telecommunications and network management.

Dave Molta, Assistant Dean for Technology Integration, comments, "While IST has always prided itself on teaching more than just technology, our students need applied technology skills in order to secure the best available jobs after graduation. We think these new lab facilities will provide a big boost to our efforts to elevate student skills.

"Over the years, we have discovered that the best approach to technology education requires a balance between classroom teaching and experiential learning. These new lab facilities will help students learn by doing, using state of the art software and hardware.

"Whether it's basketball or music or information technology, there's no substitute for practice. These new lab facilities will provide students with the ability to apply material learned in classes in a real-world learning environment.

"We've been waiting a long time for the right combination of technologies to emerge that would enable us to effectively teach advanced technology skills like operating system, database, and network administration. These new facilities will help us achieve those goals.

One of the most exciting aspects of this lab upgrade project has been the way in which students, faculty, and IT staff have worked together to apply state-of-the art technology in a pedagogically sound manner. It's been a real team effort."

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